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TOM PETTIT

Award-winning television reporter Tom Pettit, best known for his exclusive coverage of Lee Harvey Oswald's slaying, died yesterday of complications after surgery at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.

Pettit, 64, died after an operation to repair a ruptured aorta, said Beth Comstock, NBC vice president. Earlier this year, Pettit underwent a kidney transplant.

Pettit, who retired from NBC News this year, captured three Emmys, a Peabody Award and the Polk Memorial Award during a career that stretched from the Eisenhower era to the Clinton administration.

"For more than a generation, Tom Pettit represented NBC News with skill and style," said NBC News Vice President Bill Wheatley. "His work was always distinctive."

Pettit's most famous report came from outside the Dallas City Jail, where he alone was providing live commentary as police led the presidential assassin out for transfer to the county lockup.